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## Five Myths about Gaming Disorder

The announcement in June 2018 that “gaming disorder” (GD) had officially been included in the latest (eleventh) edition of the World Health Organization’s (WHO) International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11)<sup>[1]</sup> received worldwide media coverage alongside many debates as to whether its inclusion was justified based on the empirical evidence. The extensive media coverage raised many questions, but also appeared to give rise to a number of myths. Here, I address these myths in the British context, but these also have resonance outside the UK.

### Gaming Disorder Equates to Gaming Addiction

Almost all of the recent worldwide press coverage for GD was equated with gaming addiction. However, the WHO does not describe GD as an addiction and the WHO criteria for GD do not include criteria that I believe are core to being genuine addictions (such as tolerance and withdrawal symptoms).<sup>[2]</sup> Confusingly, the criteria for Internet Gaming Disorder (IGD) in the latest (fifth) edition of the Diagnostic Manual of Mental Disorders<sup>[3]</sup> do include all my core criteria of addiction. However, to be diagnosed with IGD, an individual does not necessarily have to endorse all the core addiction criteria. In short, all genuine gaming addicts are likely to be diagnosed as having GD and/or IGD, but not all those with GD and/or IGD are necessarily gaming addicts.

### Gaming Has Many Benefits So Should Not Be Classed as a Disorder as It will Create a “Moral Panic”

Predictably, the videogame industry has not welcomed the WHO’s decision to include GD in the ICD-11 and issued a statement<sup>[4]</sup> to say that gaming has many personal benefits and that GD will create moral panic and “abuse of diagnosis.” None of us in the field dispute the fact that gaming has many benefits, but many other activities such as work, sex, and exercise can be disordered and addictive for a small minority,<sup>[2]</sup> and it is not a good basis for denying the existence of GD. The videogame industry also claims the empirical basis for GD is highly contested but then ironically uses nonempirical claims (i.e., that the introduction of GD will cause a moral panic and lead to diagnostic abuse by practitioners) as a core argument for why GD should not exist.

### Gaming Disorder is Associated with Other Comorbidities, So It is Not a Separate Disorder

In a recent coverage concerning GD, those denying the existence of GD sometimes resort to the argument that problematic gaming is typically comorbid with other mental health conditions (e.g., depression, anxiety disorders, etc.)

and therefore should not be classed as a separate disorder.<sup>[5]</sup> However, such an argument is not applied (for instance) to those with alcohol use disorder or gambling disorder which are known to be associated with other comorbidities.<sup>[6]</sup> In fact, recent research among those attending treatment for GD described cases of GD both with and without the underlying comorbidities.<sup>[7]</sup> Consequently, diagnosis of disorders should be based on the external symptomatic behavior and consequences, not on the underlying causes and etiology.

### Gaming Disorder Can Now Be Treated for Free by the National Health Service

Unlike many other countries, the UK has a National Health Service whose treatment services can be accessed free of charge. A number of British newspapers<sup>[8]</sup> reported that inclusion of GD in the ICD-11 meant that those with GD can now get free treatment. However, this claim is untenable and is unlikely to happen. All health trusts in the UK have a finite budget and allocate resources to those conditions considered a priority. Treating individuals with GD will rarely (if ever) be given priority over treatment for cancer, heart disease, schizophrenia, depression, etc. In countries where private health insurance is the norm, GD is likely to be a condition excluded for treatment on such policies even though it is now in the ICD-11.

### The Inclusion of Gaming Disorder as a Mental Disorder Will Lead to “Millions” of Children Being Stigmatized for Their Videogame Playing

This myth has been propagated by a group of scholars<sup>[9]</sup> (mainly researchers working in the media studies field), but is completely unsubstantiated. The number of children who would ever be officially be diagnosed as having GD will be extremely low and – as noted above – millions of children play videogames for enjoyment without any problems or stigma.

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